

Paul Ricoeur and the Future of the Humanities.

Par . Le 8 April 2013

In the realm of the humanities, Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) is widely viewed as one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century. He published many important books and articles which made an impact on almost all areas of the humanities, including history, linguistics, literary studies, theology and philosophy.

In his works, Ricoeur combined the resources and insights of phenomenology and hermeneutics. In line with this double focus, he came to see ‘the text’ as a paradigm for addressing important historical, ethical and philosophical problems. This enabled him, among other things, to recast the problem of personal identity in terms of narrative emplotment; or to consider human action as a meaningful whole that is structured as a text.

However, in the last decades, the vast expansion of new media (video installations, social networks, games, etc.) is rapidly changing the landscape of the humanities, making it entirely different from the text-oriented culture in which Ricoeur was working. In addition, new research approaches like genetics and cognitive science, penetrate the humanities and introduce alternative paradigms which, at first sight, seem to be more in tune with the spirit of the times. Furthermore, considering the increasing marginalization of the humanities in many countries, their future course is far from self-evident. Under pressure of the financial crisis and a changing political reality, the humanities have to find new arguments for legitimating their existence and proving their importance.

Cultural, scientific and political developments like this, challenge Ricoeur’s perspective, but also create opportunities to keep his work alive and develop it in new and unforeseen directions. By means of this conference, we hope to confront present-day concerns with Ricoeur’s fruitful insights in order to help envision a future for the humanities.

The University of Groningen, The Radboud University Nijmegen and The Young Academy organize a conference on the impact of Ricoeur in the Humanities. This conference will take place in Groningen, the Netherlands, June 27-29, 2013.

Keynote speakers

- Don Ihde, State University of New York at Stony Brook
- Richard Kearney, Boston College

– Paul van Tongeren, Radboud University Nijmegen

Thus the aim of this conference is to investigate what Ricoeur's extensive oeuvre has to offer in rethinking and re-imagining the humanities. We will do this by focusing on three domains of questions.

1. Questions of interpretation.

How do we have to (re)locate Ricoeur's work in relation to the humanities? Which of Ricoeur's major contributions can be expected to remain relevant for the humanities? Etc.

2. Questions of discussion and context.

In what way can we relate Ricoeur's oeuvre to ideas and methods of other philosophers and scientists? Does Ricoeur's paradigm of the text still provide a relevant framework for thinking about the basic questions that concern the humanities? If so, how can we bring Ricoeur's perspective in a fruitful tension or dialogue with other, competing paradigms? Etc.

3. Questions of application.

How can Ricoeur's attributions to the humanities be adapted (if necessary) and applied to the new and changing situation of contemporary humanities? What are the possibilities and problems that we will have to explore while further elaborating on Ricoeur's contributions to the humanities? Etc.

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